

Norfolk Coast: Autumn Migration

Fri 2nd - Mon 5th October 2015



Clockwise from top left: Several Firecrests were seen over the weekend • A wheeling flock of Golden Plovers is a fine sight (and sound) • The Wheatear found by Carolyn • Another feature of the trip were the Yellow-browed warblers; there is one there – promise • Male Yellowhammers are always nice to see • A Turnstone at Brancaster © Golden Plovers, Wheatear and Turnstone by tour participant Hank Scarth; others by Gary Elton, Limosa

**report compiled by tour leader:
Gary Elton**

Tour Leader: **Gary Elton**
with **Stuart Bridger, Neil Clayton, Barbara Payne, Hank and Carolyn Scarth.**

Daily Diary

Day One – Fri 2nd October

The group arrived and assembled safely at our North Norfolk hotel where, after introductions and a chance to get to know each other over an enjoyable evening meal, we retired to bed full of the expectations for the days ahead.

Day Two – Sat 3rd October

The following morning saw the group assemble at the rear of the hotel to spend a short time before breakfast familiarising ourselves with the selection of common shorebirds assembled on the beach below. The hotel's position in relation to the mouth of the Wash offers a good opportunity for this. The low tide made viewing somewhat distant, but even so a selection of commoner species, including Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit and Oystercatcher, could be seen and several Great Crested Grebes were noted on the sea.

After breakfast we made our way a short distance along the coast to Holme Nature Reserve. We took a somewhat convoluted route, taking the opportunity to look for farmland species such as Red-legged and Grey Partridge, achieving good views of both. As we drove into the reserve we passed a noisy tit flock in the trees above the entrance track. After parking in the minibus, we walked back along the track to re-find the birds. This we quickly did and the more obvious species included Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits and Goldcrests, with perseverance paying off as searching through the birds revealed a Yellow-browed Warbler flitting through the leaf canopy above us. The bird unfortunately typically quickly disappeared from view though was heard to call several times subsequently further along the track.

We returned to the minibus and after collecting our 'scopes we walked a short distance along the coastal path. At least three Stonechats were seen along with several Reed Buntings, Linnets and Meadow Pipits. Carolyn had been scanning the marsh and had found a bird perched in the top of a bush, which she suspected was a Wood Pigeon. Gary looked across the marsh confirming its ID as such, but also noting three other more distant birds flying behind it. Closer inspection revealed these to be a Short-eared Owl being mobbed by two Carrion Crows - a real bonus and totally unexpected, especially at this time of day. We returned to the 'bus and after a short coffee break we made the short drive back along the entrance track to view the area of beach just north of the start of the entrance track. This point is one of the areas favoured by waders especially on high tides and on arrival, large numbers of Oystercatchers and Sanderling could be seen. Gulls and terns were also evident and close inspection revealed both Sandwich and Common Terns and an adult Mediterranean Gull.

Nearby Thornham Harbour was our lunchtime destination, where we added species such as Brent Goose, Shelduck and Greenshank, after which we moved onto nearby Titchwell Marsh RSPB reserve. Here, as usual, we enjoyed a wide selection of species, walking first to view the newly formed area to the east of the marsh, named Patsy's Pool. We then walked along the main path viewing the freshmarsh from both here and the two hides that overlook it, eventually ending up at the beach to look out over the sea. Species new to us included Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Red-throated Diver and Common Scoter.

Our final destination of the day was a return visit to Holme with the hope of once again seeing the Short-eared Owl. This we in fact did but unfortunately views were once again a bit distant, though consolation came in the form of a hunting Barn Owl and our first Egyptian Geese of the trip plus our last obvious omission for the day, Grey Heron, which left us to finish on a very respectable total of 97 species.

Day Three – Sun 4th October

Our day started again at the rear of the hotel though a very cloudy and overcast morning meant it was only just getting light and with nothing new on show we decided to take a walk along the edge of the dunes. With little of note, save a few overflying Song Thrushes, we returned back to the hotel for breakfast.

After breakfast we again drove through the local farmland, again noting both species of partridge and a solitary Stock Dove, which chose to perch perfectly for us on some roadside wires affording good instructive views. Our planned route for the day was to head east along the coastal road stopping first at Holkham Pines.

We parked at Lady Anne's Drive, which was surprising quiet and took the path that runs west just south of the pine belt. Commoner woodland birds were noted as we walked along and Coal Tits and Goldcrests could be heard calling in the trees above us. Salts pool, a unique saline pool positioned several hundred yards away from the shore, contained several Little Grebes and a Grey Wagtail, which flew over calling. Shortly after, we entered a clearing where more deciduous trees were present and more bird activity was evident. We stood and watched seeing shapes flitting through the leaf cover, then a Firecrest popped into view followed by another, with a Goldcrest and Chiffchaff with them for comparison and amazingly a third Firecrest as well! We walked further down the track visiting the elevated hide at the end of the path, which gave us views out over the freshmarsh. The visible pools contained the expected wildfowl such as Mallard, Wigeon and Teal and Pink-footed and Egyptian Geese were noted out on the grazing areas.

We returned along the same route pausing again on the edge of the nearby deciduous area. This was to prove a good move as almost immediately a Yellow-browed Warbler sprung into view! Though typically active, the bird continued to work through the same area of tree canopy allowing everyone good views. The bird flew off, being replaced almost immediately by a second, which showed just as well! Pleased with our success, we continued back along the path. A calling Great Spotted Woodpecker flying over us was followed by a Crossbill, Grey Wagtail and a Treecreeper, which showed well for us in a path side tree.

With lunchtime approaching, we made our way to Cley next and the visitor centre at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve, where we made use of the facilities on offer that included picnic tables overlooking the main area of the reserve. Large numbers of Golden Plover and Lapwing were immediately obvious and searching through these revealed several Ruff and Dunlin. After lunch we moved slightly further along the coast and parked at the eastern edge of the reserve and walked out along the iconic east bank path, which gives a nice vista to view the reserve and the large area of grazing marsh to the west. A pair of distant Stonechats were found sat out in typical fashion on dead sticks protruding from the reedbed and several Bearded Tits could be heard calling, with several of the group managing snatched views of them as they flew short distances across the reed tops. A quartering Marsh Harrier gave nice views, landing briefly in a bush nearby and several confiding Ruff showed well just west of the path.

The flooded area known as Arnold's Marsh contained a selection of commoner waders, mainly Redshank with a Greenshank a nice find in amongst them. Arriving at the end of the path we looked out over the sea noting several fishing Gannets, two Red-throated Divers, a Guillemot and a Shag, the latter a species that only appears in the winter in small numbers to the area. We spent some time watching it diving, leaping clear of the water to do this, which is in total contrast to the diving habits of Cormorants and a useful tip for separating the two species at distance. We returned to the minibus and stopped once more for the facilities at Cley. As we re-boarded, a Marsh Harrier appeared over the field hedge in front of us, quickly joined by a second bird, a ringtail Hen Harrier, but views were brief with only Gary and Hank seeing it.

We had now started heading back west along the coast and our next stop was a small privately run reserve, Stiffkey Fen. A short walk after parking took us onto the sea wall where we looked out over Blakeney Point and Harbour and also over the fen itself. Grey Seals could be seen loafing distantly on the sand spit running out from the point and large numbers of gulls, waders which were primarily Oystercatchers, and Brent Geese could be seen in the harbour channel feeding on the exposed mud. The Fen contained 100s of ducks and geese with 50 or so Canada Geese surprisingly being the first and only ones of the trip. Another addition here was a Kingfisher picked up in flight as it called and flew down the creek beside us though, as luck would have it, the bird found a suitable perch allowing us to all get nice 'scope views.

We returned to the minibus and headed to our last stop of the day, a small wood adjacent to the salt marsh on the outskirts of Stiffkey village. Several of the group stayed near the 'bus whilst the rest of us went for a short walk through the wood, which was disappointingly quiet. We walked the length of the small wood then turned and walked back through the centre of it. Fortunately our luck was in again

and whilst searching through a small group of Blue and Great Tits, another Yellow-browed Warbler was found. We walked back to the minibus, disturbing several Song Thrushes from the treetops, boarded the 'bus and made our way back along the coast to the hotel.

Day Four – Mon 5th October

With another grey start forecast for today, we decided to forego our pre-breakfast walk in favour of a prompt departure after breakfast. We again headed east along the coast, with our destination Burnham Overy and the extensive dune system there. The forecast was rain from mid morning onwards so it was very much a case of fingers crossed and hoping that the forecasters had got it wrong! We made several stops en route to search for Little Owl which was a tad optimistic as conditions were far from ideal and unfortunately drew a blank, though some small consolation came in viewing the site of Lord Nelson's birth place...well, a plaque depicting it at least!

We arrived at our roadside parking place and followed the obvious track down towards the distant dunes. The adjoining fields held small numbers of geese the most notable being the large number of Egyptian, with at least 50 present, plus Brent, Greylag and Pink-footed, with small numbers of Wigeon and Teal also noted. Several distant Marsh Harriers and Buzzards were seen and our species list for the day grew as we climbed up onto the sea wall to view the tidal harbour mouth, noting Curlew, Redshank and Grey Plover. On arriving at the dunes it was obvious things were relatively quiet bird-wise but with an element of optimism we set off in search of some new birds. An initial lull was followed by a rush of excitement with, first up, a ringtail Hen Harrier noted initially by Barbara as it flew low over the adjacent grazing marsh. Next it was Carolyn's turn as she noted a small bird on a nearby dune top, with closer inspection revealing a Wheatear hunched down low trying to avoid the chilling breeze. A fly over calling Redpoll followed next and, as we walked towards the dune edge, a roaming tit and crest flock could be seen. As we paused and watched them move through the trees the strident call of a Yellow-browed Warbler was heard, with the bird calling at least four times.

With time ticking by and the clouds getting greyer and greyer, we retraced our steps back through the dunes and back to the minibus. We drove back west along the coast to have lunch at Brancaster Harbour, which as usual gave us some great opportunities to get up close and personal with local wader species. The most noteworthy of these were a small group of Turnstone that noisily entertained us, coming within several feet of the bus and the grateful photographers amongst us. Our luck though had now run out with the few spots of rain noted on our arrival having turned into heavy drizzle, so we packed up and completed the final leg of our journey back to the hotel, and on arrival we said our goodbyes before making our return journeys home.

Gary Elton

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded by the group 113)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Roadside coveys were noted and seen well on the first two days.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

A road side coveys of three and ten near Ringstead on the first two days.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Recorded daily.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Vocal overflying skeins were noted throughout the trip, with birds also noted on the fresh marsh at Holkham.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Surprisingly only seen at Stiffkey Fen, where around 50 were present.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Easily seen at Titchwell, Burnham Overy, Stiffkey and Cley.

Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicula bernicula*

Noted daily along the coast, with largest numbers noted in Blakeney Harbour.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Noted daily.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Noted daily, with five at Holme, two at Holkham and c. 50 at Burnham Overy.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Noted in small numbers at Titchwell, Thornham and Cley.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen at Titchwell, Cley and Siffkey Fen.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Noted daily primarily at Titchwell, Cley and Stiffkey Fen

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Several were seen at Titchwell and Stiffkey Fen.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen at all wetland sites visited.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Noted daily in small numbers .

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

Easily seen at all wetland sites visited, particularly numerous at Titchwell, Stiffkey Fen and Cley.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Up to 10 at Titchwell and a single at Burnham Overy.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Six at Titchwell and two at Cley.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

A distant flock could be seen off shore at Holme, with a single more confiding male seen on the sea from the beach at Titchwell.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Two were seen from the end of the east bank at Cley and on the sea at Titchwell.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Seen at Holme , Titchwell, Cley and Burnham Overy.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Around 15 were noted on the sea between Hunstanton and Holme, with a single also noted at Cley.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

1-3 were seen daily.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Easily seen and noted at all wetland sites visited.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Seen daily out over the sea, the majority of the birds being juveniles.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily.

European Shag *Leucocarbo aristotelis*

One offshore at the end of the east bank at Cley was repeatedly watched diving, leaping clear of the water in characteristic manner prior to diving.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, generally single hunting birds.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Birds were seen at Holme, Titchwell, Burnham Overy and Cley.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

One seen very briefly by Gary and Hank at Cley, with a second found by Barbara at Burnham Overy Dunes, which showed well allowing everyone to see it.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Five seen in total during the trip at various sites.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Noted daily at various sites, now a species easily seen in the county.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

One was heard squealing several times in the reed bed at Cley whilst we sat eating lunch.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Noted daily

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted daily

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common seen daily, noted in large numbers especially at Hunstanton and and Holme..

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Two birds were noted at Titchwell.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Large impressive flocks numbering several hundred were noted at Titchwell, Cley and Burnham Overy Dunes.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Noted daily at various coastal sites.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Around 200 were counted at the high tide roost at Holme, with two others seen at Brancaster Harbour.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Noted at Titchwell, Thornham Harbour and Stiffkey Fen.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Easily seen at Titchwell, with others noted at Cley and Brancaster Harbour.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Seen along Hunstanton and Titchwell Beaches.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

A single calling bird was seen at Burnham Overy.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Seen and heard at all suitable sites visited.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Single birds were noted at Holme and Titchwell.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Common, recorded daily.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Seen at Holme, Titchwell, Thornham Harbour (2) and Cley.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Seen at Holme, Titchwell and Brancaster Harbour.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Seen on the beach at Titchwell and Holme.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Around 300 were seen along the beach at Holme.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Seen in small numbers at Titchwell and Cley.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Easily seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, with smaller numbers noted at Cley and Stiffkey Fen.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Common and again seen daily.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Noted daily at all coastal sites visited.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

As above, noted daily.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

An adult bird was found in amongst Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Lesser Black backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Around 20 birds were noted at Titchwell.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

A roosting adult was seen on the beach at Holme.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common, noted daily.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Six were seen at Holme on the beach in the high tide roost.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

One was picked out on the beach with the above species at Holme.

Guillemot *Uria aalge*

A single bird on the sea showed well for us from the end of the East bank.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen daily, primarily around the hotel building and during our travels.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Only one seen, from the minibus perched on some roadside wires near Choseley drying barns.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Common, seen daily

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Noted in and around the villages as we travelled around over the three days.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

One showed well but briefly hunting over the fields at Holme.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Seen twice, albeit distantly, on our visits to Holme.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One was seen very well perched along the tidal creek at Stiffkey Fen.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

One was seen in flight at Holkham.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Noted at various sites and seen regularly flying over the road.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Seen daily in small numbers

Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Seen daily in both fields and around village roof tops

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Several were seen well at Cley.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Small numbers were noted throughout the trip at various sites.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

One was seen briefly at the rear of the feeders at Titchwell.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Seen in the Pines at Holme and Holkham and on the feeders at Titchwell.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Noted daily, in small numbers

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

As above noted daily, with birds encountered in many of the coastal stretches we visited.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Small noisy flocks were encountered at various sites during the trip.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily,

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Singing birds were noted at Holme, Titchwell and Cley.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

1-2 were noted daily.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

A very successful trip for this species, with five birds seen in total, at Holme, Holkham (2), Stiffkey campsite wood and Burnham Overy Dunes. Yellow-browed Warblers are now a regular migrant through the UK in autumn. I wonder where they all go to in winter...

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Two were seen at Holme and one at Titchwell.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

One was seen well in the dunes at Holme.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

A variety of views were gained by the group at Thornham Harbour, Titchwell and East Bank Cley.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

Three together in a path side bush at Holkham was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Easily seen throughout the trip, with the majority of the birds presumably from an eastern origin.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Recorded daily at various sites.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

A path side bird showed well for us on our walk back at Holkham.

Eurasian Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen daily in small flocks.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Noted daily.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

An obvious arrival on our last day, with birds flushed from cover during our time at Burnham Overy dunes.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Noted throughout the trip, but as with the above a notable increase on our last day.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Roadside birds were seen daily.

Eurasian Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Recorded daily with singing birds seen near the hotel.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Three at Holme with a pair found at Cley.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

One found by Carolyn sheltering from the wind at Burnham Overy Dunes was a welcome addition to the list.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Noted daily.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Recorded daily, with largest numbers at Titchwell.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted daily, the majority calling over-flying birds, though some nice views were had of birds on the ground along the East bank at Cley..

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

A single over-flying bird was noted at Stiffkey Fen.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common, recorded daily.

Lesser Redpoll *Acanthis cabaret*

A single over-flying redpoll presumed to be of this species was seen at Burnham Overy Dunes.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Noted in small numbers daily

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Small numbers of over flying birds were noted throughout the trip.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Noted throughout the trip.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Small flocks were noted daily.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

A fortunately vocal bird flew over us at Holkham.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

At least one vocal bird was present at Holkham.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

At least four were seen well on our first morning from the minibus as we drove the local lanes.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Noted daily at various sites.

Mammals**Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*****Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*****Grey seal *Halichoerus grypus*****Brown Hare *Lepus europeus*****Weasel *Mustela nivalis*****Butterflies****Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*****Small White *Pieris rapae*****Dragonflies****Common Darter *Symetrum striolatum*****Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta***